

Australian growers on the pulse

KATHERINE MAITLAND

Australian growers are producing some of the highest quality pulses in the world, but global trade logistics and the Australian dollar are proving to be a challenge in this niche market.

According to Lachie Seears, Nuffield Scholar and guest speaker at the 2014 SANTFA Conference, Australian producers are growing exceptionally high quality pulses, including chickpeas, faba beans, broad beans, lupins and vetch that are visually appealing and consistent in quality.

“Australian pulses are exceptionally high in quality, based on visual appearance,” Lachie said. “Australian growers have a good agronomic package where they are able to get fungicide and pesticide in a timely manner, which enables them to maintain a consistent quality.

“Generally, Australian soils and climate provide the perfect platform for pulses, which are a good fit for the Australian grower, and it is good to see research undertaken to establish pulse crops in non-traditional growing areas, in particular, acidic soils.”

Pulse Breeding Australia (PBA) has a vision to expand Australian pulse production to 15% of the cropping area.



A MIDDLE EAST PULSE MARKET.

It is the quality control standards that make the Australian pulse industry superior.

Many growers choose to grow pulses because of other benefits including their role in improving cereal yields by breaking the cycle of cereal root diseases.

“There are break crop benefits from growing legumes including pulses. They are also beneficial in maintaining soil fertility because they are able to fix nitrogen that can remain in the soil, and pulse stubbles are a high protein stock feed.”

Pulses are not a high percentage of most growers’ cropping programs and pose different management challenges including correct identification and management of foliar diseases, Lachie said.

In 2013, as part of his Nuffield Scholarship, Lachie travelled to 12 countries to learn about pulse handling and processing and potential value-adding opportunities in the pulse industry.

He says the challenges faced by Australian pulse traders include the lack of transparency in the supply chain and political issues in some of the countries where pulses are in demand.

“The issues I see with the supply chain are to do with information flow. It is



LACHIE SEEARNS IN A FABA BEAN CROP IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

incredibly hard for the grower to get accurate market information in regards to supply and demand.

“Furthermore, some of the countries in the Middle East have instability in their governments, which makes business risky, and this is on top of fluctuations in the value of the Australian dollar, quarantine issues and issues around some of the marketing practices in some overseas markets for Australian pulses.

He says that despite these logistical challenges, worldwide demand for pulses continues to grow, with new market opportunities arising, and there have been significant improvements in Australian processing capabilities in recent years.

Processing plants have made significant investments in infrastructure here in Australia, and they are taking the risk off the grower when it comes to export challenges.

“Processing plants have made significant investments in infrastructure here in Australia and are taking the risk off the grower when it comes to export challenges,” Lachie said.

“Pulses are an important food source for the increasing world population, which is estimated to reach 9,000,000,000 by 2050.

“They are traditional foods in Northern Africa and the Middle East, in particular, and are in demand all over the world. In recent years demand in India, China and South East Asia has increased significantly and as the world’s population grows there will be a need for continued increase in pulse production as a protein source.

“Processing facilities in these countries range from world class to very primitive. Pulse-processing plants are expensive to set up, wherever they are, and require significant capital investment.”

Countries such as Canada and the US are value-adding their pulses through a variety of food and domestic products, he said.

“Canadians are large producers of lentils

in particular. They are doing some clever value-adding projects with pulses including pulse flour and using pulses in dog food.

“Pulses offer nutritional value, healthy food alternatives and are a good source of protein and I think Australians should be looking at the possibilities of value-adding pulses domestically and internationally to reach markets more efficiently.”

Angela Greenhalgh, Managing Director of Grainpro Pty Ltd, in Dubbo, says that while Australian growers are growing quality pulses, it is the quality control standards that make the Australian pulse industry superior.

“Australian chickpeas and faba beans are

usually good quality, but wet years can reduce this quality,” she said. “I think where we really stand out is in the production and quality control practices that we employ.”

Angela agrees that Middle East countries are the biggest consumers of pulses worldwide, but says these markets are heavily influenced by price.

“Demand for pulses for human consumption is mainly from the Indian sub-continent and Middle East,” she said.

“The main issues with global trade logistics in these countries are seasonal conditions and price. The price of pulses is influenced by production, and prices dictate supply.”

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